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*A Brief Look at Methodology and Grace in Wesleyan
Theology*

Abstract

In a recent piece for the Asbury Theological Journal, Nathan Crawford has attempted to put current understandings of emergent phenomena within the neurosciences in conversation with Christian soteriology; in particular, Crawford has sought to link up themes found in emergence with distinctively Wesleyan perspectives on sanctification. In this article, I offer some reflections on theological methodology in light of Crawford's analysis, and I identify some needed clarifications of Kenneth J. Collins's model of John Wesley's soteriology. In the latter half of the piece, I present a critical analysis of the issue of monergism and synergism in Wesley's understanding of grace.

Keywords: monergism, synergism, grace, methodology, John Wesley, free will, determinism, soteriology

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I. Scientific Emergentism and Theological Methodology

In a recent piece in the *Asbury Theological Journal*, Nathan Crawford has attempted to put current understandings of emergent phenomena within the neurosciences in conversation with Christian soteriology; in particular, Crawford has sought to link up themes found in emergence with distinctively Wesleyan perspectives on sanctification. He defines emergence as “the theory that cosmic evolution repeatedly includes unpredictable, irreducible, and novel appearances.”¹ According to Crawford, theology can use the “kind of thinking” employed in the neurosciences to enrich its articulation of doctrinal matters, in this case the doctrine of entire sanctification.² Crawford goes on to offer a constructive proposal that he believes sheds light on the debate between Kenneth J. Collins and Randy Maddox, proponents of the two main competing interpretations of John Wesley’s theology. Toward the end of his piece, Crawford argues that if the creation and evolution of human persons have been shown to be emergent phenomena, we can speculate that salvation and sanctification are emergent phenomena as well.³

There is much to commend a methodology that seeks to illustrate coherence between the work of God in creation and the work of God in salvation. The achievements of science in terms of improving our understanding of the material world can illuminate and inform the task of soteriology, which is the branch of Christian theology that seeks to give a logical account of the nature of human salvation. Likewise, our understanding of how God works in salvation can shed light on God’s creating and sustaining work in the natural world. All truth is God’s truth, so we should expect general revelation and special revelation to be not only logically consistent, but also mutually reflective of one another. The Christian worldview has the wherewithal to provide such a unified and integrated vision of reality. So, for instance, science can tell us much about the makeup of the human person in terms of the brain and neuroscience, which we can then correlate with Christian theological anthropology.⁴

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the limitations and potential pitfalls of such a methodology, some of which Crawford himself is explicitly aware.⁵ To begin, we cannot assume that God’s work in creation will always have a direct or complete parallel with the Lord’s work in salvation. While some such parallels may exist between the two spheres, we need to possess more than merely suggestive evidence based on loosely analogous relationships before we can make responsible extrapolations. Moreover, the Christian Scriptures, interpreted in the context of the church, contain the clearest and most complete revelation of God’s saving activity in the world, and hence they should serve as our preeminent source for soteriological truth. This should have a significant impact on our theological methodology.

Because our independent knowledge of soteriological truth through general revelation is often spotty, limited, and unclear, we should start with God's complete revelation in Scripture and work from there. Unless we have strong evidence from nature for a proposition *relevant to soteriology*—evidence that is stronger than the evidence we possess for a logically incompatible interpretation of Scripture—it is more epistemically and theologically sound to follow the light of God's special revelation regarding that proposition.⁶

Our methodology should differ substantially if we are dealing with scientific propositions—propositions about the natural world. In what I see as the classical Wesleyan view on the role of Scripture, the Bible does not purport to speak authoritatively on the intricacies of the processes of nature. Questions about such topics are best posed and answered within the realm of the physical sciences.⁷ This is not to say that the Bible has nothing to say about the nature of physical entities, but its primary purpose is to speak on matters of salvation and our relationship to God. Nevertheless, it would also be a mistake to view science and theology as occupying utterly disconnected epistemic spheres, “never the two shall meet.” As Alvin Plantinga has pointed out, belief that a divine creator is the ultimate cause of nature will (rightly) affect our evaluation of the plausibility of various scientific hypotheses, even if that creator never interferes directly in the world beyond the initial creation.⁸

In addition to these methodological considerations, to which Crawford may well be amenable, many would take issue with his seeming view that all of God's work in creation from the Big Bang onward can be subsumed under a gradualistic, process-oriented paradigm via evolution.⁹ He importantly leaves out the Big Bang itself—God's creation of the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*)—which surely must be seen as a non-gradual, instantaneous act; indeed it is a miracle.¹⁰ At the moment of the Big Bang, the natural universe in its nascent form comes into being out of nothing with all of the necessary prerequisites for life as the result of the sheer free will of God. Wesley pointed to creation and the giving of life as a species of the free grace of God, the sovereign work of God alone.¹¹

But beyond this, insisting that all of God's creative activity *after the Big Bang* falls under emergent or evolutionary labels seems to overshoot the scientific evidence. Are we certain that evolution or emergent phenomena can explain all complexity in nature, including the origin of life from non-life? It seems to me that this would be to go beyond currently available scientific evidence, even if all biological complexity can be explained via natural, Darwinian evolution (Darwinism can begin only when there is life). It is possible that God has performed miracles in the course of natural history that disrupt any emergent relationship between new phenomena

and old phenomena. Because we lack a comprehensive understanding of natural history, we should not assume that a comprehensive evolutionary or emergent paradigm can explain everything in the natural world.¹²

II. Competing Interpretations of Wesley Clarified

In his piece, Crawford briefly summarizes both Collins's and Maddox's interpretations of Wesley's theology before presenting his own constructive proposal. Crawford concedes that his discussion is "slightly arbitrary" and that "the two are much more nuanced" than he has shown.¹³ One certainly cannot expect Crawford to address each and every subtlety in these two competing readings of Wesley, but in this case Crawford's lack of nuance results in a misrepresentation of Collins's view. While Crawford does note that the "instantaneous" (Collins's) and the "process" (Maddox's) views, as he terms them, do not mutually exclude one another, he fails to illustrate adequately the *conjunctive* nature of Collins's view of Wesley's understanding of sanctification that incorporates both process and crisis elements.¹⁴

The source of the confusion, I think, lies in Crawford's frequent conflation of the process of sanctification with entire sanctification, a distinction that is critical in understanding Collins's view on these matters. In his published work, Collins has argued for a process of sanctification that begins after the crisis of the new birth and in which the tempers of the heart are gradually transformed and made holy by God's grace.¹⁵ The process of sanctification is to be distinguished from entire sanctification, which in Collins's reading of Wesley is a second, distinct work of grace that issues in a qualitative change from an impure heart to a fully pure heart. In one moment the heart is impure, and in the next it is pure by the actualization of entirely sanctifying grace.¹⁶ Once the distinction between the process of sanctification and entire sanctification is made clear, one can see that Collins has a place in his interpretation for gradual growth by degree in sanctifying grace. But whereas Maddox tends to focus on the process-oriented dimensions of Wesley's thought in a seemingly exclusive way, Collins presents an *ordo salutis* that incorporates both process and crisis elements of Wesley's soteriology.

It is worth noting two more aspects of Crawford's presentation that need some tweaking. Firstly, he reports that Collins separates the twofold problem of sin into the "outward appearance" of sin and "the problem of original, inbred sin." In point of fact, Collins, following Wesley, distinguishes between *actual* sin, pertaining to deliberate acts that go against God's clearly revealed will ("willful transgression of a known law of God"), and *original* or *inbred* sin, pertaining to sin as a state in the form of unholy tempers and dispositions.¹⁷ The distinction between outward and inward sin is a different matter. To illustrate the difference, one can commit actual sin, on this

definition, even if it has no outward manifestation whatsoever. For instance, one may surrender to the intention to commit adultery without ever having the opportunity to commit the act outwardly. Inbred sin, alternatively, can manifest itself in outward behavior, as when our partly well-intentioned actions are mixed with sinful motives.¹⁸

Secondly, Crawford seems to impute the view that original sin is a “juridical punishment upon all of humanity for the sin of Adam” to Collins, though this view is repudiated by both Collins and Maddox.¹⁹ Both interpreters highlight Wesley’s growing opposition to the notion of original/inherited guilt, which is reflected in Wesley’s work in two ways: first, Wesley eventually argued that any guilt inherited from Adam is cancelled at birth by the atoning work of Christ.²⁰ Second, Wesley omitted the allusion to inherited guilt in the Ninth Article of the Anglican *Thirty-nine Articles* when he pruned and reformulated them for the Methodists in America. Both interpreters agree that the evidence from Wesley’s works indicates that he was far more comfortable speaking about original sin in terms of inherited *corruption* rather than inherited *guilt*.²¹

III. A Fresh Look at Wesleyan Grace

Many of the church’s hottest theological controversies have been over the role of divine grace in human salvation. It comes as no surprise then that some of the most central debates in Wesley studies are over the nature of divine grace and its relationship to the human will. On the one hand, Collins has argued for an overarching distinction between “co-operant grace” and “free grace.” When he speaks of co-operant grace, Collins is lifting up threads of Wesley’s thought that involve divine-human cooperation, what is commonly called synergism. With co-operant grace, God takes the initiative, but human beings must work as well. By free grace, Collins is referring to those points in Wesley’s *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) in which God works “alone” apart from all human working, what is commonly termed monergism.²² He sees free grace as a departure from divine-human synergism in Wesley’s thought. Collins seeks to hold these two conceptions of Wesleyan grace in a conjunctive balance. On his interpretation of Wesley’s thought, God “works alone” in the *ordo salutis* (via free grace) in prevenient grace, justification/regeneration, and entire sanctification.²³

On the other hand, Maddox identifies “responsible grace” as the overarching conception of grace in Wesley’s theology. Maddox’s responsible grace is essentially identical to Collins’s co-operant grace. It highlights the necessity of God’s gracious, empowering initiative, while affirming that human persons must also work with this grace in a divine-human synergism.²⁴ Collins wants to affirm Maddox’s insights, but he argues that a failure to incorporate free grace into one’s overall view of grace results in a distorted,

semi-Pelagian reading of Wesley's theology that neglects Wesley's well-worked theme of the work of God *alone*.²⁵ But although Maddox does not give the monergistic work of God a name or make it a central feature in his historical and constructive account of Wesley's theology, he nevertheless finds monergism in Wesley's theology in terms of God's creating and sustaining activity in the world.²⁶ Collins, too, finds the theme of monergism in Wesley's understanding of creation.²⁷

Before we evaluate these two reigning conceptions of Wesleyan grace, we need to take a short excursus in philosophical/systematic theology in order to get a firm grasp on the concept of monergism. As a theological term, "monergism" is generally defined as entailing the work of God alone to the exclusion of *all* human working or activity. Whether God is working alone in a unilateral sense that does not entail determinism, or whether the Lord is working alone in a deterministic/irresistible²⁸ sense, the basic idea is that the Lord is the *only* causal actor in any moment of monergistic grace to the exclusion of *all* human working, as the term itself suggests.²⁹ Monergism is typically seen as contrasting with synergism, which involves both divine and human work—divine/human cooperation.

It seems clear from the evidence marshaled by Collins and Maddox that John Wesley did develop both synergistic and monergistic conceptions of grace.³⁰ The conjunction of divine working *and* human working is not sufficient to capture the totality of Wesley's thought on grace; one needs an even larger conjunction involving both divine-human cooperation *and* the work of God alone.³¹ As we have already noted, Wesley explicitly states that God works utterly alone in the creation of the world. In addition to this, Wesley sees God as working unilaterally in many of the Lord's providential acts, including some that involve human beings and their salvation. For instance, as Wesley notes, God's sovereign power alone establishes the following decree: "He that believeth shall be saved: he that believeth not shall be damned."³²

Moreover, as Collins rightly notes, a logical implication of Wesley's views on original sin and total depravity is that prevenient grace (in Outler's "narrow sense," which is the more common usage in Wesley) must also be understood as a species of genuine monergism in terms of restoring four key features of human personality in response to the fall: a basic knowledge of the attributes of God, a partial re-inscription of the moral law, conscience, and a measure of free will.³³ Apart from God's prevenient grace, we would be a mass of sin, utterly unable to respond to God either positively or negatively, for we would lack the essential features sufficient for personhood. Collins is explicit that God's work is "irresistible" at this point.³⁴ This might be something of a misnomer, as on Wesley's view there is no person in place capable of resisting God's grace apart from this restoring prevenient

grace due to the severe effects of the Fall.³⁵ Nevertheless, God's work in the initial restoring act of prevenient grace is at least unilateral in that God is the only one working. Indeed, even the ongoing prevenient overtures of God's grace in addition to this initial restoring activity can be characterized rightly as monergism insofar as they continue to occur apart from our positive response (and in the face of our negative response), which reveals the unilateral, though non-deterministic, nature of ongoing prevenient grace.³⁶ Any positive response to grace depends upon God's ongoing bestowal of prevenient grace.³⁷ So both initial, restoring prevenient grace and ongoing prevenient grace are examples of genuine monergism, for God works alone in both instances.

Does Wesley develop a monergistic understanding of justification/regeneration and entire sanctification? I think the answer to this is in one sense "yes" and another sense "no." In order to approach this particular issue, we first need to note that Collins seems to use the language of "monergism" and "the work of God alone" (interchangeably) to refer to two somewhat different phenomena in his theological interpretation of Wesley. On the one hand, he uses it to refer to the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God that does not involve or entail any human response whatsoever, such as the Lord's work in prevenient grace.³⁸ On the other hand, he uses it to refer to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, which he holds are resistible works of God that require the necessary condition of our free reception.³⁹ This dual-usage can also be seen in the fact that Collins uses his umbrella term for the monergistic work of God, "free grace," to cover God's conditional work in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, as well as the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God in prevenient grace.⁴⁰

This ambiguity in Collins's terminology is likely a reflection of Wesley's own slightly ambiguous use of this language, which is actually an indirect testament to Collins's faithfulness to the source material.⁴¹ Wesley himself applies monergistic language both to the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God in creation, providence, and prevenient grace, which we have already seen, *and* to the resistible and conditional work of God in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification. An example of the latter usage can be found in *Predestination Calmly Considered*, in which Wesley asserts, "It is the work of God alone to justify, to sanctify, and to glorify; which three comprehend the whole of salvation."⁴² Furthermore, in addition to speaking of the unilateral or irresistible/deterministic work of God in creation as a species of "free grace," Wesley also speaks of God's resistible and conditional work in conversion as "free" as well: "One may freely give you a sum of money, on the condition you stretch out your

hand to receive it. It is therefore no contradiction to say, "We are justified freely by grace, and yet upon certain terms and conditions."⁴³

It is straightforwardly clear how God's work in creation, providence, and prevenient grace can be accurately described as monergism in Wesley's thought: there are no conditions for human beings to meet at such junctures, so it clear that God works utterly alone at such moments, whether this is understood in a unilateral or an irresistible/deterministic sense. What is less clear is how God's work in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification can be accurately described as monergism in light of both Wesley's and Collins's affirmation that aspirants of these graces must perform a free⁴⁴ act of consent in order to receive them. Can this apparent contradiction be resolved? Can we make sense of monergism at these moments of grace, or must Wesley be interpreted as a synergist with respect to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification for the sake of logical consistency?

Collins describes the condition of consent required to receive these graces as an "*almost* passive" act of surrender and faith.⁴⁵ He wants to avoid calling this surrender a "work,"⁴⁶ but it seems clear that insofar as one is not totally passive when one exercises such an act of faith, one is engaged in some degree of activity, however minimal. Such an almost passive act is still an act, which is to say that it is a movement or operation of the will that requires some measure of causal exertion by the agent. Because this act is enabled by God's ongoing prevenient grace, we are talking about divine-human cooperation here; in other words, we are still in the synergistic model at this point.

This does not, however, complete the picture of what happens in these crucial moments of grace. While we indeed do something even in an almost passive act of faith, what exactly is it that we do? If we understand this act of faith as leading to a state of "openness" before God in Wesley's theology, as Collins does⁴⁷, it is plausible that the goal of such an act is to enter into a state of truly total passivity before God's grace. Collins seems to express a worry that total passivity before God's grace would rule out genuine human freedom and entail determinism, which is why he is careful to describe the act of faith in crucial moments of grace as being "*almost*" passive.⁴⁸ While this concern is understandable, it seems clear to me that so long as God does not causally determine us to choose something in such moments, and so long as an agent freely chooses to enter into a state of total passivity before God's grace, there is nothing incompatible between total passivity and standard accounts of libertarian freedom and human agency. What this means, interestingly enough, is that monergism does not necessarily entail determinism even when it comes to our positive responses to God.

In order to get an idea of what such an act of surrender would look like,

consider the analogy of a patient submitting to an inherently painful operation by a medical professional. The natural inclination of the patient is to resist the doctor's work altogether because of the unavoidable pain involved in the procedure. Resistance represents activity of the will, regardless of how considerable or slight that activity is. Now imagine that this operation requires the patient to lie flat and idle on a table. If the patient chooses to submit to the operation, she essentially chooses to cease resisting and enter into a state of complete and utter inactivity of the will. Although it takes an act of the will to enter into such a state, the state itself represents total passivity and a complete lack of human effort and willings. The only person working after such a surrender is the doctor who is performing the operation.

If we apply the same kind of sequential thinking to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, we can see the subtle way in which synergism gives way to monergism at these crucial operations of grace. By freely and cooperatively relaxing ourselves into the grace of God through an almost passive act of faith, we enter into a state of total passivity before God's grace. In this act, we simply cease giving into our natural inclination to resist the grace of God. Such an act of faith should be understood as a complete relinquishment of all exertion and activity, as one surrenders to an operation or to sleep.⁴⁹ This synergistic act of surrender, which is enabled by the ongoing prevenient grace of God, gives way to genuine monergism once human activity completely ceases and the Lord alone is at work.

While justification/regeneration and entire sanctification are different from other instances of monergism in Wesley's theology in that they require a synergistic work of faith as a necessary condition to receive these graces, once this condition is met we indeed break through to genuine monergism at these soteriological points.⁵⁰ By willing to enter into a state of non-willing, we choose a state of completely passive openness before God as the Lord alone works unilaterally. We need not first "be or do thus or thus," as Wesley puts it, in terms of contributing to God's work beyond presenting ourselves to God so that the Most High can accomplish it.⁵¹ God is the one and only causal actor in such moments. Moreover, the powerful works of grace wrought by God at the soteriological points of justification/regeneration and entire sanctification are radically disproportionate to the paltry work we do to receive them, and far more crucial than the gradual growth in grace that takes place before and after these moments.⁵²

In the course of this analysis, I have touched upon two related issues that must nevertheless be kept distinct in order for fruitful dialogue on Wesleyan grace to continue to take place. The first is the matter of interpretation: What did Wesley mean? What reconstruction reflects his most mature theological reflection? The second is the question of logical

consistency and theological soundness: Was Wesley logically consistent in his various affirmations? Does he ever equivocate over certain terms?⁵³ I have not developed a fully-orbed model of Wesley's theology fit to compete with that of Collins and Maddox in this short paper. Instead, I have focused my analysis of Wesleyan grace on the issue of monergism and synergism in Wesley's theology of grace. I affirm with Maddox and Collins that in Wesley's thinking, God displays genuine monergism in the Lord's creating and sustaining activity in the world. Furthermore, I agree with Collins that Wesley sees God as working alone in the work of prevenient grace. I also have noted that Wesley understands God to work monergistically in certain providential decrees.

When it comes to justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, I believe Collins is on the right track in identifying these works of grace as instances of monergism in Wesley's thought.⁵⁴ There is no doubt that Wesley uses the language of "the work of God alone" to characterize these soteriological moments. I have presented some further clarifications and distinctions that can help us see that there is an irreducible element of synergism involved in almost passively receiving these graces. This synergism gives way to monergism as the will chooses to drain itself of all activity and effectively turn itself off before the grace of God.⁵⁵ It does seem that genuine monergism logically entails total passivity on the part of the agent at these points, for God must be the sole causal actor in order to be the only one working. This does not, however, imply or entail determinism at these points. Moreover, it should be obvious that the cooperation entailed by almost passive acts of surrender is radically different from the synergism involved in our highly active works of mercy and piety, as we are talking about an almost passive act of surrender that results in a state of total passivity. We might employ a distinction between *weak* and *strong* synergism to make the difference clear.⁵⁶

I hope that the brief reflections offered in this paper can prompt fresh and exciting reflection on the topics of methodology and grace in Wesleyan theology. Examining our methodology of theology requires us to dig deeply in order to uncover our most basic philosophical and theological presuppositions about the nature of knowledge, revelation, and God. The more we examine these presuppositions, the better our theological thinking will be. And when we analyze grace, we are analyzing the work of God in bringing people to salvation, a task that is as important as it is challenging. Whenever we enter into either conversation, we must be sure to represent our dialogue partners accurately so that fruitful and illuminating interaction can take place.⁵⁷

End Notes

¹ Nathan Crawford, "Science and Theology in Conversation: Emergence Theories of Consciousness and Entire Sanctification," *Asbury Theological Journal* 64, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 40-41.

² Ibid., 41.

³ Ibid., 50.

⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁵ Ibid., 48-49.

⁶ Note that I am not claiming that the Bible should unconditionally override our independent judgments in every instance. The evidence from the Bible has to be strong enough, and the evidence from nature has to be weak enough, to make such moves epistemically sensible.

⁷ Kenneth J. Collins, *Evangelical Moment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 71-78.

⁸ Paul Draper, "God, Science, and Naturalism" in *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 283-284.

⁹ Crawford, "Science and Theology in Conversation," 50.

¹⁰ Crawford, 48.

¹¹ All subsequent references to John Wesley's works are taken from *The Works of John Wesley*, vols. 1-14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007). *Sermons*, 1:7 This is not to say that all miracles must be instantaneous. The concept of a progressive or gradual miracle is certainly coherent.

¹² If God does not exist, evolution is the only explanation available to explain both the existence and the complexity of life. The theist has more explanatory options on the table.

¹³ Crawford, "Science and Theology in Conversation," 48.

¹⁴ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 15-16.

¹⁵ Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Topography of the Heart: Dispositions, Tempers, and Affections," *Methodist History* 36, no. 3 (April 1998): 162-75.

¹⁶ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 293-303.

¹⁷ Ibid., 217-222.

¹⁸ While I affirm the validity of Wesley's distinctions here, I think more are necessary to explain the complex nature of the will, sin, and sin's effects on our relationship with God. Willfulness, for instance, can come in degrees, from the most fully flagrant act to the most passive and subtle consent of the will. There are many actions that can be partly meant for good and partly meant for evil. Inbred sin (distinct from temptation) invariably results in actual/willful sin in some measure, the willfulness of which can come in degrees. The new birth may subdue our sinful nature, but insofar as we are still sinful, it will find expression in our everyday lives in some measure until we are perfected in love. It is therefore appropriate to speak of ongoing forgiveness in the Christian walk.

¹⁹ Crawford, "Science and Theology in Conversation," 46.

²⁰ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 74-75.

²¹ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 64.

²² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

²³ *Ibid.*, 162; 292-293.

²⁴ Maddox, 86-87

²⁵ Collins, 204.

²⁶ Maddox, 55.

²⁷ Collins 27-28.

²⁸ Determinism is the view that an agent's actions are determined by causally sufficient prior causes outside of the agent's control. To say grace is irresistible in a theological context usually means that such grace causally determines the choice(s) of the will, whether proximately or remotely. God clearly works monergistically when His work alone is causally sufficient to determine human choice(s).

²⁹ Cf. "Pelagianism: A Monergist Model of Redemption," <http://evangelicalarminians.org/glynn.Pelagianism.A-Monergist-Model-of-Redemption> (although I do think Arminianism allows for monergism beyond initiating prevenient grace); "A Simple Explanation of Monergism," http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/monergism_simple.html; and "Monergism," <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/monergism>. We will see that God can be the "only efficient cause" of justification/regeneration and entire sanctification without overriding genuine human freedom, so long as God does not causally determine our choices in such moments, and so long as human beings are free to cause themselves to enter into a state of total inactivity of the will. In other words, God can work alone in a real sense without working deterministically, which may come as a surprise to some Calvinists.

³⁰ Collins, 155-164; Maddox 91-93.

³¹ Collins, 164-165.

³² "Predestination Calmly Considered," *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses*, 10:235.

³³ In my own view (distinct from Wesley's), I believe it is more accurate to speak of God's prevenient grace *upholding* or *preserving* these features of human personhood. In other words, I do not believe the first sin of the Fall caused humanity to plunge immediately into total depravity, at which point God needed to *restore* the basic features of personhood. Rather, I believe that God's grace swooped in immediately (and unilaterally) at the Fall, checking the downward spiral of sin and giving us the choice to respond positively to God or to reject this grace and become yet worse. On this view, it is still the case that any goodness remaining in human beings is due to the special, prevenient grace of God; it is just *preserved* goodness, not *restored* goodness. I find it implausible that the first sin of the Fall would result in total depravity.

³⁴ Collins, 70-82.

³⁵ Collins seems to contradict implicitly his own view on the irresistibility of initial prevenient grace in a footnote, in which he denies that God ever displays "deterministic activity" when he works monergistically, including in prevenient grace. See Collins, 79; 350 n197. It is more accurate, I think, to describe God's monergistic work in prevenient grace as unilateral rather than irresistible/deterministic.

³⁶ Of course, our wills may be actively engaged in sin when God draws us with prevenient grace, but the point is that this grace continues to work even when we

are not performing any positive work with respect to our salvation.

³⁷ In my view, it is when we respond positively to prevenient grace that it *becomes* justifying and sanctifying grace. Seemingly discrete categories of grace often bleed into one another in practice.

³⁸ Collins, 80-82.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15, 160-165; 203-205; 292.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82; 160-161; 203; 291-292.

⁴¹ In fact, the ambiguity goes deeper in Wesley, as he is somewhat unclear as to whether conversion is resistible or irresistible. See *Sermons*, 6:280-289; *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses*, 10:363; 10:230-231; 10:309. Collins picks up on this ambiguity in Wesley's thought in his earlier work, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon press, 1997), 98-99. As we mentioned, Collins is clear in his most recent work that he views justification/regeneration (conversion) as resistible. Evidently, Collins believes that the mature Wesley moved beyond the irresistibility of converting grace, at least in most cases.

⁴² *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses*, 10:230.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10:209.

⁴⁴ Wesley clearly has a libertarian (Arminian) view of freedom. Thus, for him a free act is an undetermined act. See *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses*, 10:468-469. Calvinists do not deny that we repent and exercise faith, but they hold that such actions are determined by God, and repentance and faith are typically seen as following regeneration rather than preceding it. But how can Calvinists consistently hold that God is the only actor/agent in salvation from start to finish (total monergism), as they generally do, while also holding that human beings have any real kind of agency, as they generally want to do? What this reveals, I think, is that Calvinists often unwittingly display libertarian intuitions with respect to human agency; without explicitly affirming it, Calvinists implicitly find compatibilism to be insufficient to underwrite genuine human agency.

⁴⁵ Collins, 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 162-163; 204.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 15, 163.

⁴⁹ What is crucial here is that the *will* ceases all exertion and activity. The body naturally will still display activity, though in an *involuntary* way, whether we are talking about surrendering to an operation or surrendering to the grace of God.

⁵⁰ Wesley seems to hold that God can bring about entire sanctification (and presumably conversion) whenever the Lord pleases, it being a species of divine freedom and sovereignty. Indeed, in a key passage, Wesley seems to be affirming that it is only conditionally necessary that we do works do prepare to receive entirely sanctifying grace. See Collins 288-293. Two things need to be said about this. At the very least, as Wesley (and Collins) affirms, faith is absolutely necessary to receive the gifts of God. If we refuse to meet this condition, then God cannot grant us these graces without overriding our personhood. Secondly, most if not all persons require time and opportunity to arrive at the state of spiritual receptivity required to receive freely entirely sanctifying grace. It is precisely our pride that must be overcome before God can convey entirely sanctifying grace in a way that respects

our personhood. So while I affirm with Wesley and Collins that the soteriological timetable is surely in the hands and guidance of the Sovereign Lord, it is not just the will of God that is a factor here, but also the will of man. Most if not all people require time and opportunity before they are prepared to receive entirely sanctifying grace.

⁵¹ *Sermons* 2:53. Of course, we do have to freely receive these graces through an act of faith. While such acts of surrender themselves surely are almost passive, it often takes a great amount of moral effort—strenuous cooperation with God's grace—to overcome one's pride in order to be willing to perform almost passive acts of surrender to God.

⁵² Collins seems to assume that the work of God alone and receiving grace always entail a qualitative or instantaneous (crucial) change in Wesley's thought, but I do not believe he has defended this entailment. See Collins 14-15. In my reading of Wesley, God works alone at various points throughout our Christian walk and the process of sanctification, not just at crucial moments of grace such justification/regeneration and entire sanctification. This means that there is "receiving grace" in Wesley's thought beyond qualitative or instantaneous works of grace. For an example of this, see *Sermons* 1:226. In other words, I think God can and does work alone on us in incremental degrees (with us receiving this work over time through almost passive acts of faith) on Wesley's view, as well as instantaneously and qualitatively (such as in justification/regeneration and entire sanctification).

⁵³ Note that the issue here is logical consistency and proper use of theological language. While I certainly affirm that there is plenty of room for mystery, paradox, and tension in theology in their proper place, we ought to push logic and clarity as far as they can go before appealing to such notions, and we certainly should not be comfortable with logical contradictions. The point of a soteriological model, after all, is to explain, not to obscure.

⁵⁴ As Collins rightly points out, Wesley does use parallel language when describing justification/regeneration and entire sanctification, implying that God works in comparatively instantaneous/qualitative ways in both. See Collins 287-288. In my own view (distinct from Wesley's), entire sanctification is just the completion of the process of sanctification (which includes both receiving and responding grace along the way). On this view, entire sanctification is still a threshold change of sorts: it issues in a qualitatively distinct kind of life (a life without the drag of original sin) as well as a quantitative change (less sinfulness than before, namely, none).

⁵⁵ Although I do not endorse the entirety of his analysis and conclusions, my analysis regarding freedom and grace here is indebted to Kevin Timpe's "Grace and Controlling What We Do Not Cause" in *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2007).

⁵⁶ Note that nothing here undermines Wesley's quite Reformed view of justification, in which the forgiveness of sins is *based* solely on the work and merits of Christ *alone*. The fact that we must perform a synergistic work to *receive* this grace does not change the *basis* or *ground* of justification. Our act of faith is the "formal cause" (condition) of our receiving justification, but God's work in Christ alone remains the meritorious cause of justification. See Collins, 107; 169-181.

⁵⁷ Thanks to Kenneth J. Collins, Jerry L. Walls, David Baggett, Philip Tallon, Adam Blincoe, Jeremy Buchanan, and (last but certainly not least) my wife, Courtney Blanchette, for helpful criticisms and clarifying comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Thanks to Adam Blincoe for challenging some of my former theological thinking on this topic and inspiring some of the insights of this paper.